

THE BARNET SOCIETY'S RESPONSE TO THE DRAFT LONDON HOUSING STRATEGY BY MAYOR SADIQ KHAN

7 December 2017

The Barnet Society was founded in 1945 to protect the Green Belt and this is still our main priority. The Society currently has about 400 members, most of whom live within the Chipping Barnet constituency.

We were very pleased to be asked to respond to the Mayor's proposed London Housing Strategy which aims to build more homes for London that are affordable, of high quality, respectful of the environment and to provide a fair deal for renters and leaseholders. The Society is mainly supportive of the proposals providing the **Green Belt** is preserved and affordable housing is expanded to include social as well as other forms of affordable housing.

Chapter 3 – Building homes for London

The Society agrees with these proposals. These sites are a scarce resource and once developed are gone for ever so it is important they are used for affordable and social housing. We would suggest if the land is owned by TfL or NHS then these bodies should have nomination rights so they can be used for their key workers who are currently being priced out of London. This is not a new idea as previously Griffin Housing Association used to provide homes for London Transport workers. We think this would encourage TfL and NHS to sell the sites rather than retain them in case they need them in the future.

Chapter 4 – Delivering 50% genuinely affordable homes

The Society are really pleased the Mayor is suggesting 50% of all new homes be affordable but would like him to revert back to the old policy that this should include 25% social housing. This policy ensures not only that affordable housing is provided but encourages mixed communities. We are also fully supportive of the Mayor scrutinising schemes to check viability and to continue checking over the years and recouping the money if it is found to be a viable scheme after all.

It is the term 'affordable housing' that concerns us, as currently housing is unaffordable to those that need it most. We would like to see far more social housing prioritised either provided by Local Authorities or Housing Associations. It used to be social housing where the rent was subsidised because the property was built with a grant or home ownership – part rent, part mortgage and the resident staircases up over a period of years until they own 100%. This enabled people on lower incomes to live in a decent standard of accommodation throughout London. The London Housing Strategy identifies the following as 'affordable'. The Society thinks this is disingenuous and hides the fact there is very little social housing.

London Affordable Rent:

This is usually rented property let at 80% of market rent which in a borough like Barnet is **not** affordable. Similarly there is now a cap on housing benefit, which means many properties are too expensive for those living on benefits in Barnet and they are being housed in places like Luton and Milton Keynes where rents are lower.

London Living Rent

It is suggested London Living Rent properties are provided at a lower than market rent for incomes below £60,000. Again this does not address the issue of providing houses for the average low paid worker or the 'just about managing'. These are exactly the people who want to get on the property market and buy outside London and commute or consider shared ownership.

London Shared Ownership

This is a well- established form of affordable housing but we believe that because property prices are now so high in London the average worker finds it very difficult to pay the mortgage and the rent and the service charges, so it is becoming less attractive in areas where property prices are high.

We note you want to prioritise affordable housing on public land. One option is to consider housing for key workers such as nurses, hospital porters, teachers, TfL workers, police and shift workers. These people are not high earners and cannot afford property in London so are being priced out. However London needs these key workers in order to run a successful city and they need to be in close proximity to their place of work.

The Society endorses your opposition to Pay to Stay, the Bedroom Tax and would abolish Right to Buy completely and agree that when regenerating a scheme there should be no loss of social housing.

Chapter 5 – High quality homes and inclusive neighbourhoods

The Society supports all the proposals in this chapter and looks forward to receiving the GLA Good Practice Guide for Estate Regeneration.

Chapter 6 – A Fairer deal for private renters and leaseholders. –

The Society agrees this needs fundamental reform and supports all the proposals made in the Strategy.

Chapter 7 – Tackling Homelessness and helping Rough Sleepers

The Society supports the proposals to tackle homelessness and requests the GLA lobby the Government to ensure there is a higher benefit cap for supported housing or the cap is abolished to facilitate the aims of the strategy.

The Barnet Society also supports the aim to reduce the number of Rough Sleepers, but this will be unrealistic if more supported housing is not built and the benefit is not increased to pay for the support. Also the GLA should support the Housing First policy which means supported housing is provided for homeless applicants with multiple and complex needs very quickly in order they can address their issues in a safe place where support is provided.

Under-occupation

This is not covered in your Strategy but in suburbs like Barnet there are many elderly people living in family sized accommodation, and there should be incentives to encourage them to downsize. This would require building smaller properties, sheltered housing, providing 1 and 2 bedroom flats, perhaps abolishing stamp duty or providing a scheme to assist with conveyancing to make it easier for older people to move.

In addition, under-occupiers should be encouraged to let spare bedrooms to students or low-earners at below-market rents in return for the latter providing some home help.

Draft London Plan

This was published last week, and we are very concerned about two suggestions:

- A third of new housing is to be on small sites including building on back gardens and extending existing houses.

The Barnet Society is not against the concept in principle but in Chipping Barnet this has been carried out extensively over the past years and there is now very little scope for it to be done economically or without detriment to neighbours. Also most suburban 3-bedroom houses cannot accommodate separate dwellings being built in the garden as there would be problems with access and loss of light and privacy.

- Planners cannot reject buildings because they do not fit in if they are within 800 meters of a transport hub or town centre.

The Barnet Society is concerned that the proposed development could be in a Conservation Area. If you draw a line around the transport hub and town centres in the Chipping Barnet vicinity it would include Green Belt and other green areas which is not acceptable.

The geography of Chipping Barnet will make both these proposals difficult to achieve and will lead to piecemeal developments. What is needed is a complete local spatial strategy giving developers clear guidance on where high densities would and would not be acceptable to preserve sights of greenery, the sense of place, spaces for recreation, and despite the proposed sedum roofs, the opportunity for a less polluted environment.

Conclusion

The Barnet Society supports most of the London Housing Strategy but wants to ensure the Green Belt, Conservation Areas and other green spaces are maintained continuing to contribute to the pleasant environ that is Chipping Barnet for the many who pass through, as well as those who live here. It would also like to see more social and other affordable housing provided in future developments.